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1821

A.

DISCOURSE,

DELIVERED AT THE DEDICATION

✓
OF THE

AMERICAN ASYLUM,

FOR THE

EDUCATION OF DEAF AND DUMB PERSONS,

MAY 22d, 1821.

BY THOMAS H. GALLAUDET,

PRINCIPAL OF THE ASYLUM.

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NOTE. *It may be proper to remark, that the following discourse was delivered on the front steps of the Asylum; the audience being seated in the yard immediately before it.*

DISCOURSE.

2d. CORINTHIANS, 5th. CHAP. 1st. VERSE.

“ For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.”

THE faith of Paul in the promises of God, was an anchor to his soul, both sure and stedfast, amid all the sorrows and troubles of life. Experience had taught him not to look to human aid for support, nor to seek repose in earthly comforts ; for both, he well knew, like the temporary shelter of a house, might fall beneath the arm of violence, or crumble into ruin from the natural progress of decay. He felt himself a stranger and a pilgrim on the earth ; his home was in heaven, rendered sure to him by the declaration of his divine master ; “ in my father’s house are many mansions, if it were not so, I would have told you, I go to prepare a place for you.” To this final rest from all suffering and sin, Paul looked forward with such delightful anticipation, that even his affliction appeared but light and momentary, and he considered it as working out for him a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. The faith which enabled him to do this, he thus describes ; “ While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen : for the things which are seen are temporal ; but the things which are not seen are eternal. For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.”

By the expression, “ earthly house of this tabernacle,”

I apprehend the apostle intended something more than the mere human body, and referred rather to our residence in this world, which from its transitoriness and uncertainty, might well be compared to a tabernacle or tent, and thus be fitly contrasted with the permanency and stability of the heavenly state.—Thus you see what was the true source of the Apostle's consolation under affliction and of the zeal and hope which animated him in the midst of his trials ; he regarded things temporal, as he would the accommodations of a house, which, with all its conveniences and comforts, is nevertheless destined to inevitable dissolution ; he fixed his affections on things eternal, on his home in the heavens, on that building of God, whose foundation is sure, whose walls are imperishable, and the beauty, order, and magnificence of which, infinitely surpass all our conceptions. These sentiments of the apostle, and the spirit which dictated them, seem to me, my Brethren, peculiarly suitable for us to imbibe on the present occasion. We see before us a little group of our fellow beings, who are called in the mysterious providence of God to endure affliction. This affliction may become comparatively light to them, and, as it were, enduring but a moment ; could it be made instrumental of working out for them a far more exceeding, and eternal weight of glory.—They are just introduced into an earthly house well calculated for their accommodation ; but it becomes both them and all of us, who feel interested in their welfare, to keep constantly in mind, that this goodly edifice with its various sources of instruction and improvement, is one of the things, which though seen perhaps with grateful satisfaction is still temporal, the worldly advantages of which may prove uncertain and must be transitory, and at which, therefore, we ought not to look with any sense of a strong and undue attach-

ment, but rather, raise the eye of our faith, and persuade these sufferers to do so likewise, to a better home, to that building of God, the house not made with hands eternal in the heavens. When I say that the worldly advantages of this Asylum may prove uncertain, do not understand me as wishing to disparage their true importance and value. To do this would be alike unwise and ungrateful. It would be unwise ; for Godliness hath the promise of this life as well as of that which is to come, and it is only a misguided enthusiasm which can aim to prepare youth for a better world, without, at the same time, training them up to a faithful discharge of all their duties in this. It would be ungrateful ; for every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused if it be received with thanksgiving ; and we might as well close our eyes upon the budding beauties of the season, which the kind Author of Nature is now unfolding to our view, as to shut our hearts against that general aspect of convenience, and that prospect of future comfort to the deaf and dumb, which the same Giver of every good and perfect gift, deigns to shed over the establishment which we wish this day to dedicate to Him who has thus far fostered and protected it.—But the brightest hopes of spring sometimes fall before an untimely frost, and human establishments of the fairest promise, have often been so perverted from their original design, as to become the nurseries of error, or so conducted in their progress, as to promote the views of personal interest ; or so decked out with the pomp and circumstance of greatness, as to serve rather for the ornaments with which ambition would love to decorate itself, than as the plain and useful instruments which the hand of unostentatious charity would employ to dispense her simple and substantial benefits to the suffering objects of her care.—Believe me these

are the rocks on which this Institution may be shipwrecked. Its very prosperity should serve as the beacon of its danger.

Many of you, my Brethren, recollect when your interest for the deaf and dumb was first excited by a single individual of their number, thus afflicted, as it were, by Providence, for the very purpose of turning her calamity into the source of blessings upon her fellow-sufferers ;—and now, when about six years only have elapsed, since she was regarded as almost a solitary instance of this calamity among us, I see her in the midst of a considerable circle of those whom she was destined to relieve, many of whom, with herself, have already completed the fourth year of their education, while they this day are assembled in their own house, reared by the charities of individuals and the munificence of both state and national bounty, with means of comfort and instruction, far surpassing the most sanguine hopes that were indulged by the friends of the Asylum at its commencement.—My Brethren, such unexampled prosperity is dangerous, and those to whom the guardianship of this institution is entrusted, will do well to watch against its insinuating effects.

Man, whether in his collective or individual capacity, is a fallen and degenerate being. He is always prone to look at the things which are seen and are temporal, and to neglect those which are not seen and are eternal. And this explains a most singular problem of human nature. You will find individuals whose hearts overflow with all the charities of life ; kind, gentle, amiable, honorable,—willing to practise almost any self-denial and to expend almost any bounty, in the furthering of plans for the relief of the temporal distress of their fellow-men.—And they will erect the most princely establishments to furnish the sickness of poverty with a couch of ease, and to

afford the wandering stranger a home, and to soothe the sorrows of the widow and supply the wants of the fatherless, and to control or mitigate the worst of all human evils, the maddening diseases of the mind, and yet they can do all this and think nothing of the souls of these sufferers ; make little or no provision for their spiritual necessities ; and while every thing is done to render the earthly house of their tabernacle convenient and comfortable, they are not warned that they must soon leave it ; they are not urged to secure a residence in a better home, “in the building of God, the house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.”—In saying this, far be it from me to decry the offices of Humanity ; but why not blend these offices with the nobler charity which the gospel inspires.—While men will lavish all the skill and experience that their bounty can procure to heal the diseases of the body, why perform only half the cure, why leave the patient to languish under a more dreadful malady, the corruption of a depraved heart ; why not take advantage of the composure and self-reflection, which his very hour of bodily suffering brings with it, to soothe the pangs of his conscience, to allay the torments of remorse, to ease him from the burden of sin, to refresh his parched soul with the well-spring of eternal life, to point him to that physician in whose gift is immortal health and vigour.

—My Brethren, look at this fact—it is to be found on the pages of all the histories of mere Philanthropy ; and shows the danger to which all establishments of benevolence are exposed. Forgive me, then, for dwelling on this perhaps unwelcome topic. But I do feel that the solemnities of this day, if they have any meaning, call upon all who are interested in the welfare of the establishment, to keep steadily in view its simple, original design, that of making it the gate to heaven, for these

poor lambs of the flock ; for, without such means of instruction, they must continue to sit in darkness, and in the region of the shadow of death, ignorant of the immortality of their souls, of their accountability to God, of their future state of being, of the destinies which await them, of the corruption of their own hearts, of the necessity of repentance towards God, and of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and of the influence of that Holy Comforter, which can alone renew them in the temper of their minds and prepare them for the inheritance which is incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away.

Besides, by thus making the spiritual benefits of the institution paramount to all others, its temporal advantages will be best secured. For the former afford the surest foundation of the latter. If it is thus devoted to the cause of Christ and to the building up of his kingdom among the deaf and dumb, such a feeling of dependence on God, of accountability to him, and of reliance on his providential support, will be produced among those who manage its concerns, as to give the most consistency, energy, and success to all their measures and operations for its welfare. It will then be placed, if I may so speak, under the more immediate protection of the Saviour, it becomes entitled to His covenant promises, it forms a department of His vast and increasing empire in this lower world, and He stands pledged to overshadow it with the arm of His mighty and irresistible protection.

Again, by devoting this institution to the cause of Christ, the moral influence of the truths of the gospel will have an important and salutary effect even upon its purely intellectual and temporal departments, and the government of the pupils.—Truth is often said to be omnipotent. It is the instrument which the Father of spirits employs to enlighten the minds and purify the hearts of His intelli-

gent creatures. But truth is one, and there is probably a real connexion between all kinds of truth both human and divine ; for the Author of those operations of nature which furnish the data from which physical truths are derived, and of those dispensations of providence and grace from which moral and religious truths are derived, is One and the same Almighty Being, directing and controlling the vast movements of His power, and the mysterious processes of His wisdom, and the inflexible dispensations of His justice, and the engaging displays of His goodness, upon one harmonious plan, all tending to one result, the brightest illustration of His glory, and the best good of all who love and serve him.—Now in this plan, moral truth holds a higher rank than intellectual, and has a nobler influence on the mind ; and I apprehend that the youth whose understanding is early opened to the reception and influence of the truths of the gospel in all their beauty and simplicity, will make the fairest and most rapid progress, even in his attainment of merely human knowledge. Sin darkens the understanding as well as debases the heart. Had man remained in his primeval state of innocence, probably much of that very obscurity which attends the researches that philosophy has been attempting to make, for ages, in the discovery of physical truth, and which has been attributed simply to the limited powers of the human faculties, in this imperfect state of being, would never have existed, and much that now appears mysterious, would then have been clear.—But there is a view of this subject somewhat more practical, which gives it, if not a more elevated, at least, a more heart-felt interest.—How much of the successful education of youth in any department of knowledge depends upon the docility of the pupil, and on the influence which the instructor has over him. How is this docility best to

be cultivated ? How is this influence to be maintained so as to combine respect with love ? No precepts like those of the gospel diffuse over the opening character that tender ingenuousness of feeling which is so lovely in youth ; it is like the dew of heaven, whose mild lustre sheds a fresher charm over the budding flower, refreshes its infancy, and nurtures its growth into all the fulness of its maturer beauties.—The faculties of the child expand in their most desirable form, nay its very acquisitions of knowledge are most rapid, when the affections of its heart are properly cultivated, and they cannot be so without making use of the doctrines, and precepts, and example of that Saviour who was the friend of the young and helpless.—Education, could it be conducted upon strictly gospel principles, would soon prove by actual experiment, that the influence of the religion of Jesus Christ, in fact elevates and ennobles all the powers of the understanding, while it purifies and hallows all the affections of the heart.—And, in the same way, it would not be difficult to show, that if it is to be one of the leading objects of this institution to form its pupils to those habits of useful employment which will qualify them to contribute to their own future support, and to prepare them to sustain the various relations, and discharge the various duties, of life, with credit to themselves and comfort to their friends, that this is best to be accomplished, by leading them to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and then all these things shall be added unto them. I have been led to these reflections, my Brethren, from considering what appeared to me to be the real nature of the occasion which has brought us together. It is to dedicate this Asylum to Almighty God. It is not simply to consecrate this building, or any particular part of it, to the services and ceremonies of religious worship, although we indulge the hope that this will

form an important feature of the establishment, and give the pupils the opportunity of enjoying this privilege in a manner adapted to their peculiar situation. But we rather assemble here to dedicate the whole institution, in all its departments, and with all its benefits, to the service and honor of Him who has so kindly reared and cherished it, and to invoke His blessing and protection upon it.

On such an occasion, so solemn and so interesting, it is becoming, it is safe, nay we are under the strongest obligations, to surrender this whole institution into the hands of Him, who retains a property in every gift which He bestows upon us, and under whose direction, and by the guidance of whose precepts, we can best secure and enjoy all our blessings.—Hence I have endeavoured in this discourse to show, that it is both the duty and interest of those to whom the guardianship of this Asylum is entrusted, to keep its original and leading design steadily in view, to make the religious welfare of the pupils its great object, and to conduct all its other departments, not upon worldly or merely humane principles, but under the wholesome laws and maxims of the gospel of our Saviour. Let us then, my Brethren, all of us who expect to be engaged in its affairs, or who are interested in its prosperity, now, in the presence of Almighty God, and with a humble reliance on His aid, proceed to dedicate this Asylum, in all its departments, and with all its interests and concerns, to the service of the Father of mercies, to the honor of the Redeemer's name, to the grace of the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, invoking the continuance of the Divine blessing upon it, that it may prove a rich, a lasting, an eternal benefit to the suffering objects of its care. Thus built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone, it will be established upon the rock of ages; and when these walls, which the

hands of man have erected, shall have mouldered into ruin ; when nothing but the winds of heaven, shall sigh in melancholy murmur through the desolation of these goodly scenes which surround and embellish it ; when the last memorials of its founders and patrons and friends, the lonely tombstones of their grass-grown graves, shall have crumbled into dust and ceased to preserve even their very names from oblivion ; when its present and future inhabitants, the cherished objects of its care, shall have left, one after another, this earthly house of their tabernacle ; we will indulge the delightful hope, that it will have proved to each of them, the preparatory entrance, the outer court, of the building of God, the house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.—And that this may prove the happy lot both of them, and of all who now surround them, and shew this interest in their welfare, may God of his infinite mercy grant. Amen.



DEDICATORY PRAYER.

FATHER of mercies, and God of all grace and consolation, enable us, at this time, to raise unto thee the united desires of our hearts, in behalf of those whose necessities thou hast not forgotten, and whom thou hast visited, in their calamity, with the kindest tokens of thy regard. We would reverently admire the overflowing abundance of thy bounty, and the countless ways in which thou dispensest thy gifts to the sinful and suffering children of men.—We thank thee, for all that thou hast done, both in this and other parts of the world, to succour those who are deaf and dumb, and we do beseech thee to bless them, and the institutions which cherish them, with the

kindness of thy paternal care, with the light of thy gospel, and with the dew of thy grace.—Especially would we acknowledge, with humble and devout gratitude, all the manifestations of thy goodness towards the Asylum established in this place. By the wonderful workings of thy providence, thou didst direct the attention of the benevolent to these children of suffering; thou didst prepare and open the way for their relief; thou didst move the hand of charity to supply their wants; thou didst provide the means of their instruction; thou didst touch the hearts of the wise and honorable, and the rulers of the land, with compassion towards them; and, now, to crown all thy other gifts, thou hast gathered them, as it were, beneath the shadow of thy wings, into this their own dwelling, in which, we humbly hope, both they and many of their fellow-sufferers, will be made partakers of still greater and richer blessings.—In all these things, we desire, O God, to see, to acknowledge, and to adore the hand of *thy* power, and the riches of *thy* bounty. “Not unto us, O! Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name, be all the praise and all the glory.”—And, now, O! Lord, what shall we render unto thee for all these thy benefits.—We can only give back to thee what thou hast already given. Wilt thou, then, enable us,—by the aid of thy Holy Spirit, through the intercession of thy Son, and with faith in him, at this time, most solemnly to dedicate this Asylum to thyself.

Almighty and most Merciful God, in behalf of those whom thou hast called, in thy providence, to direct and govern the concerns of this Asylum, we do now dedicate this whole Institution to thee; to thee, in all its departments of intellectual, moral, and religious instruction; to thee, in all its privileges of worship, prayer, and praise; —to thee, in all its domestic regulations, and various

means of comfort and usefulness ;—to thee, with all its benefits, both spiritual and temporal,—beseeching thee to accept the offering, and to make it subservient to the promotion of thy glory, to the honor of thy Son Jesus Christ, and to the building up of his kingdom in the hearts of all who have been, who now are, or who may be, the objects of its care. O ! Thou Father of mercies, take now, we beseech thee, this Asylum, with all its interests under thy future protection. Defend it from every danger by thy Almighty arm. Give it all salutary favour in the sight of our fellow-men.—Excite the prayers of thy own children in its behalf.—Shed down upon all who are entrusted with the direction and management of its concerns, in their several stations, and in the discharge of their respective duties, a spirit of wisdom and prudence, of patience and kindness, of fidelity and industry ; so that all things being conducted in thy fear, may meet with thy blessing, and result both in the temporal and spiritual good of those who resort hither for instruction. May the pupils ever be taught the truths of thy gospel, in all their affecting simplicity and force. May the friend of the wretched, the Saviour of sinners, the Son of thy love, here abundantly display the riches of his grace, in gathering these lambs of the flock into his own fold, and in making them meet for an entrance into the spiritual land of promise, the Canaan of eternal rest.

We would also remember before thee, O ! thou hope of the afflicted, the many deaf and dumb in this and other lands, who are still enveloped in the midnight of intellectual and moral darkness ; we beseech thee, in thine abundant goodness, to make provision for their relief, and to cause, that while the consolations of thy gospel are extending to almost every corner of the earth, these helpless may not be forgotten by their fellow-men.

In imploring these blessings, Almighty God, we humbly confess, that we are most unworthy to receive them.—For we are sinners in thy sight, and if thou shouldest be strict to mark our iniquities, we could not stand before thee ;—we would look to Jesus Christ alone and to his righteousness, for acceptance with thee. O ! for his sake, wilt thou hear us, and grant us an answer of peace. And to the Father, to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, be rendered everlasting praises. Amen.



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